"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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## Agriculture, Rural Life, and the Church in the Postwar Era

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INTRODUCTION

The end of this war could come within six months; it will probably come within a year; and almost surely it will end within a year and a half. The end of the war will mark the beginning of a new era in our social, economic, and spiritual existence. Our entire nation will undergo a period of readjustment unequalled by any previous experience in our history.

It will be a very different experience from that of preparing for and fighting the war. In going into the war we became economically and industrially integrated. Every phase of our economy had to fall in step with a national plan, and from the material standpoint the results have been amazing indeed.

None the less important has been the psychology of a nation at war. Although a few favored groups may have gained social and economic advantages from the war, the great mass of the American people have made both economic and psychological sacrifices. Psychologically, we have all been living under a tension and have had to repress many of our peace time desires and ambitions.

The end of the war will snap the tension and release these long suppressed desires. How far this psychological rebound will go, it is impossible to say. That it will have vast dimensions and will be of great significance to the church is certain.

Very soon after the war many governmental controls over our economy will be removed. There will be a stampede in the business and industrial world to gather in the profits of satisfying the public's stored up demand for goods. There will be, therefore, a short period of post war prosperity for both industry and agriculture. A wise government will see to it that these post war economic adjustments are made as orderly as possible - but it will be very difficult to maintain the same rigid controls that we have had during four or five years of war. Freedom of private and individual enterprise is determined to have another fling at the same sort of prosperity which we had in the 1920's.

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After the first orgy of post-war spending is over, after some sort of international order is restored, after our boys have returned, and after the country gets back on a full time peace basis, then we will again be face to face with the fundamental problems and issues of living in a great industrial society which is growing increasingly complex and difficult.

What these problems and issues are in terms of agriculture and rural life and how they impinge on the rural church and its program is the subject matter of this paper.

## The War and Agriculture

The war has demonstrated, as never before, the fundamental importance of agriculture in the national economy. Before the war, and in some places during the war, there has been a misunderstanding of the true function and importance of agriculture. It has been common place to hear and read:

> "... farmers are even more dependent on city buying power than is city industry on farm buying power."

All this is true but it is a narrow economic view of the complex interrelationships between agriculture and industry, and between the rural and urban worlds. Even though farmers are becoming every year a smaller and smaller proportion of the workers of the nation, they are none the less "important" from the standpoint of feeding and clothing the nation. That is to say, since more and more people are becoming dependent on agriculture; agriculture is becoming more and more important.

The war has shown the importance of the farm population as a source of man-power both in war industry and in the armed services. Farm families have, in spite of agriculture deferment, furnished more than their share of the armed services - simply because the farm birth rate has been higher than the city birth rate. The great urban areas of America are producing less than 70 per cent of the children needed to maintain their population; but the farms are producing about 50 per cent more children than are needed to maintain farm populations. Without the surplus of farm and rural youth, our nation would not have had the man-power needed for waging the war.

But an even more important lesson has been driven home by the war. The war has shown how full employment increases the demand for farm products. The rationing of farm products has given added emphasis to this fact. Farmers are asking, and will continue to ask, why this full employment cannot continue until after the war.

## Farmer - Labor Relations

Farmers are also beginning to see as never before the close interrelationships between their own interests and those of non-agricultural workers. Unfortunately, certain selfish anti-labor interests have found it easy to prejudice farmers against urban workers. For instance, the earnings of urban workers during war time have been grossly misrepresented; and the amount of time lost because of strikes has been greatly exaggerated.

This question is fundamental to the welfare of the nation. In Germany before the war, the large farmers lined up politically with industry to defeat the labor groups and Hitler's fascism was the result. In Sweden, the farmers lined up with labor and prevented the country from being plunged into a fascist revolution. If big business in America should be successful in wooing agriculture away from labor then the future of democracy in America will be dark indeed.

Herein lies a great opportunity or responsibility of the church, namely, to help these two great social classes, farmers and laborers, understand each other. It is

largely a matter of spreading the truth: To farmers, the truth about labor; and to labor, the truth about agriculture.

## The Technological Revolution in Agriculture

After the war the technological revolution in agriculture will continue. The United States Department of Agriculture, the agricultural colleges, and the research departments of the great farm machinery companies are grinding out research findings at an amazing rate. The trend is made increasingly complex by the flood of research results coming from the laboratories of industries competing with agriculture, or processing agricultural products.

Contrary to popular opinion, farmers do not reap the full benefits of mechanization and of other technological improvements. These improvements have made it possible to produce at lower costs, but because of competition and other economic relations, farmers are forced to sell at lower prices. Also, as Henry George pointed out years ago, technological improvements cause land values and hence, rents, to rise.

Furthermore, there are some very serious social consequences and costs of technological change which cancel out many of the advantages. Displacement of tenants and laborers by machinery is a recurring social evil. We are told that these displaced workers will find other jobs and occupations, and that in the long run technological change will be a blessing to mankind. Perhaps so, but in the meantime the displaced workers must spend years in poverty or on public relief. Besides the new occupations into which they must go are service occupations where workers are unorganized, wages are low, and where there is little social security.

Another serious social consequence of the technological trend is the breaking up of old established rural communities, and hence, the destruction of fine old rural institutions, including rural churches. Continual mobility of farm population or of part-time farm workers has ruined and is ruining the programs of many rural churches. We can expect more of this sort of thing in the post war world unless in some way we can give the farm family a firmer toe-hold on the land; more home ownership and more security of tenancy.

## Growth of Materialistic Philosophies

The technological revolution and its social consequences have a spiritual counterpart. Indeed, some thinkers say that the technological revolution itself is a result of spiritual forces or rather of the decay of spiritual forces. My own thinking on this matter is given in the following statement which I prepared for the Seminar on Land and Human Welfare, held at Duke University under the leadership of Dr. J.M.Ormond:

"Long before the present war the human and cultural values of rural life were being undermined by the rapid growth of materialistic economies and philosophies. The philosophy of modern materialism says in effect that the main business of life is the production and distribution of material goods. This materialistic philosophy implies that man's greatest need is for physical comfort and pleasure; and that this need can be satisfied by constantly increasing the consumption of material goods. In modern man's struggle to achieve higher and higher material standards of living he has lost some of the most precious human and cultural values of the older agrarian cultures. He has given up the pleasure of peaceful, quiet rural activity for the frantic, nerve wrecking occupations of the modern city. He has given up the deeply satisfying values of primary association with life long friends and relatives in the rural neighborhood for the unsatisfying temporary contacts in the rapidly changing panorama of urban secondary associations. But worse than that, he has given up a type of family life which was the culmination of thousands of years of social evolution."

Under the domination of modern materialism, agriculture instead of being a "way of life" tends to become a means of making money. Specialization, bigness, and efficiency become the dominating values. "One crop" agricultural economies develop. Land is mined and eroded. The ownership of land passes from the hands of peasant families and tribes into the hands of absentee landlords, large scale operators, and speculators. Human beings become "labor supply", farm tenants, sharecroppers, or landless peons. In the process old peasant agrarian cultures disintegrate. The rural family is broken up, losing not only its hold on the land but also its rich social heritage.

Under this extreme philosophy of commercial farming the independent farm owner loses the security that lay in land ownership and production for home use. He becomes a slave to the town market and a victim of the money lenders. Many mortgaged farm owners are little more than tenants of banks and credit institutions. It is quite common for them to pay out more money in interest and taxes than tenant farmers in the same areas pay out in rents.

The decay of human and cultural values in rural life is accentuated by the extreme forms of mechanization and technological changes which are continually taking place. Machines displace tenant farmers, and entire families become migratory workers. New methods of synthetic food and fibre production add continually to the confusion. Almost overnight hundreds of thousands of cotton farmers may find their economic status destroyed by the invention of a mechanical cotton picker or their market taken away by the competition of synthetic fibres.

The growth of the modern city epitomizes all the evils of the philosophy of materialistic commercialism. Human populations crowd into cities because of population pressure in the country but also hoping to raise their material standards of living. But the modern city completely submerges the individual and all but destroys the human family as a social institution. The old rural neighborhood characterized by cooperation, hospitality, and friendliness has no counterpart in the city. People are employed and paid as individuals, not as families. Materialistic consumption and costs of living go up and birth rates go down. The city with all its economic organization and efficiency has failed in its most fundamental function of all - biological survival. Cities are thus parasitic upon the country in a very real sense. Without migration from rural areas cities, particularly in highly urbanized countries, would very soon begin to decline in population.

When urbanization and commercialism spread to the country side, the human and cultural values of rural life begin to disappear. The struggle for material progress becomes intensified, the rural birth rate drops, rural institutions become commercialized - all in the name of progress. Rural schools, under the influence of urban patterns become consolidated and the curriculum is oriented toward urban occupations and urban values. The rural church frequently remains as the last vestige of the older agrarian culture; but it in time too languishes for want of a stable, spiritually minded membership. Witness the rapid disappearance of rural churches in the commercialized agricultural areas of the middle west.

## Objectives and Programs

It would be a mistake to assume that technology and material progress are bad per se. Our social situation will not be helped by "turning the wheels of progress backward." We must look forward. Man and society must in some way become the master of his machines, his science, and of the new civilization.

Human and cultural values must be placed first. If we do this, and it is here that the church can be of most help, many of our new discoveries and inventions instead of bringing about human misery and social disorganization, will add to man's happiness and security.

The problem which we face then is one of ways and means of developing a new philosophy and a new way of living which will provide the social and spiritual equivalents of the older agrarian cultures.

This new way of life cannot be achieved by means of an individualistic type of character education or by an other-worldly ceremonial religion. Morals cannot be taught and character cannot be developed in a social vaccum. Our religious and ethical teaching must be expressed in terms of vital social objectives. The program of the church in the post war era must revolve around man's struggle to find a satisfactory solution to the great social and economic problems of the day.

The church need not become a partisan agency in a narrow political sense; but whenever fundamental issues of human justice and welfare are at stake, it must always be partisan, i.e., it must stand fearlessly on the side of justice and of full life for the common man.

Let us survey briefly some of the rural social movements where the spiritual leadership of the church is most needed.

## Security on the Land

A stable and secure population on the land is the most important and fundamental of all the social problems of rural people. Indeed, the very existence of the church itself is dependent upon this factor. In this and previous conferences your group has wisely given considerable attention to this subject. There is little need for me to discuss it further. You have already expressed yourselves most emphatically on the problems of soil conservation, home ownership, the family farm, better landlord-tenant relations, the cooperative movement, and related questions. You are to be highly commended for your progressive stand in these matters.

There is only one phase of this problem that I would like to discuss briefly: and that is cooperative farming. You have correctly placed much emphasis on the family farm. Yet we must recognize, I think, that large scale mechanized, industrialized or factory type farms are far more efficient from strictly an economic point of view. When these large farms are run by individuals or corporations purely on a commercial basis, they are destructive of the best and finest values of rural living.

Is cooperative farming the answer? Can we not develop family farming in conjunction with large scale cooperative farms?

The recent investigation of the Farm Security Administration which resulted in the liquidation of all group farming experiments by the government, did not prove that cooperative farming was either unsound or inefficient. Under other and more favorable circumstances these farms might have succeeded. In fact at the time they were liquidated, many of them were doing quite well and others could have been reorganized and salvaged. Yet the investigating committee labelled them "communistic" as if that were enough to damn them forever.

In the post war era, we may regret having turned our backs on experimentation with cooperative farms. Consider Russia's apparent success with its collective farms modified to permit family subsistence farming. Without mechanized collective farms,

Russia would have found it impossible to have fed its great armies which have fought so gloriously against Nazi Germany. And if Russian food production had failed the consequences for the civilized world cannot be imagined.

Now, in the post war era, Russian agriculture will be in competition with American agriculture. Can our family farmers compete on an equal basis? Is cooperative farming in certain areas of America one answer?

## Security Without Land

With the development of industry, and with the decay of our self-sufficient agrarian culture, new insecurities have risen and new ways of providing security have developed. Our evolving social security system aims to provide a security that can no longer be found on the land. It now provides old age insurance. However, not everyone is covered, nor are all serious types of insecurity and impoverishment planned for.

Farm people and other self-employed persons are not included in our present social security system. Employees of churches and of other nonprofit institutions are also not covered. New legislation is now before Congress which would cover these groups. The new legislation also proposes to protect all people against disability and to provide for a complete system of hospital and medical care.

Farm people are yet seemingly unaware of the significance of this legislation. Perhaps here is an opportunity for the church and particularly its leaders to act as interpreter and advisor. Unfortunately some of the large farmers' organizations have either been opposed or have given only scant attention to this question. Further information on it might be obtained from the Social Security Board.

## A Planned Social Economy

Social security measures, as necessary as they are, cannot be considered as a cure-all for a sick economy. They may delay the next economic depression, and they may soften its impact on certain groups, but they cannot prevent it altogether.

A planned economy is the only logical solution to our fundamental social and economic problems. After the war we can produce as much as we consumed in 1939 with 8,000,000 fewer workers; and in that year, it must be remembered that we had over 9,000,000 unemployed. Since 1939 two and one-half million additional workers have been added to the labor force because of the changing age distribution. We face the prospect without even a depression, of from 19 to 20 million unemployed within two or three years after the war. This can only be avoided if steps are taken to plan and coordinate all commercial production including agriculture. Anything short of this will result in economic and social catastrophe.

A planned social economy is much more than a narrow materialistic concept. If we are to think of it as simply a more efficient system of producing and distributing material goods, then we may as well forget it. It is rather a great social and spiritual dream of a high order. It must be permeated with a well balanced human and spiritual philosophy which only the church can engender.

The development and propagation of a philosophy and moral basis for a planned social economy presents a great challenge to the church, rural and urban. It is here, it seems to me, where religion and life meet in the fullest sense. The traditional Christian dream of a Kingdom of God may well receive its greatest realization in the development of a socialized planned economy in America, and hence, the whole world.

That it seems to me is the message that the world is waiting to hear.